

THE ABORIGINES OF THE SOVIET FAR EAST

have probably been exaggerated, partly to serve as an excuse for the inefficiency of Soviet administration and partly as a pretext for the anti-Shaman measures taken by the régime. The fight against the Shamans took the same forms as the campaign against other religions of the Soviet Union, ranging from ordinary anti-religious propaganda to administrative terror. The Far Northern cells of the League of Militant Godless were in charge of the former. In view of the complicated character of Shamanism it was no easy affair to combat it and a more thorough picture of its regional diversities had first to be obtained. The League of Militant Godless therefore urged its northern groups to compile a detailed register of the Shamans which was to answer the following questions about each of them: What is the range of activity of the Shaman? Is he a family Shaman or does a larger group of people avail itself of his services? What speciality does he have? Is he a sea-Shaman accompanying fishermen on their expeditions? Is he a tamer of snowstorms? Does he claim to have any influence on the results of hunting? Is he engaged in healing reindeer and people? What sort of cult objects does he possess? Drums? Costumes? Does he hold collective séances? What is his social origin? Detailed information about these and other points was to be sent at least twice a year to the Central Council of Militant Godless, Moscow, Sretenka Street Nr 10.³⁰

756

798

756

661

It does not seem that the League of Militant Godless had many people on the spot with a sufficient knowledge of folklore and anthropology to carry out the 'registration of the Shamans' and it is more than likely that the whole scheme failed. Other anti-Shaman measures were more successful. For instance, pressure was brought to bear on Shamans to give a solemn pledge that they would renounce their activities. Collective statements of several Shamans were even published in the local Press stating that in the past they had been 'wreckers' and 'cheaters'.³¹ In other cases where such self-recriminations could not be obtained, Shamans were expelled from their tribal territory or arrested and put on trial. By arresting Shamans the Soviet authorities wanted to show the people that they did not fear their power and that Shamans were not protected by the spirits.

Notwithstanding all these measures of intimidation and persecution the Shamans were still a fairly important factor at the time of the adoption of the Stalin Constitution of 1936. When the constitution was subject to a nationwide discussion the Shamans once more showed their anti-Soviet bias and they did so again during the elections to the Supreme Soviets of the U.S.S.R. and the R.S.F.S.R. in 1937 and 1939 respectively. According to Oleshchuk, one of the leaders of the League of Godless, the Shamans tried 'to falsify the Soviet Constitution, undermine the elections and exploit the electoral campaign for counter-revolutionary aims'.³²